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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literatuare on projective techniques of personality assessment and their use by school psychologists. Following a brief survey of the development of projective techniques, several of the most widely used techniques are briefly discussed, i.e., the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), the Childrens Apperception Test (CAT), the Picture Story Test, and two used in conjunction with the Rorschach, the House-Tree Person and Machover's Figure Drawing Technique. The theoretical assumptions and empirical issues related to the use of projective techniques by school psychologists are reviewed as they have been discussed in the literature by Musser and Naylor (1954), Lesser (1957), Kagan (1956), Leary (1957), and Murstein and Wolf (1970). Issues of reliability, validity, and meaningfulness are discussed in relation to several tests, e.g., the pyschopathology scale of the Hutt adaptation of the Bender-Gestalt test, the Kinetic Family Drawing, the Rorschach (with various populations), and the Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development. Special issues in the evaluation of young children, i.e., age, developmental status, verbal ability, mood and overall ease in the test situation, are delineated, and the value of the use projective techniques is summarized. (MCF)

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Review of Projective Personality Assessment Techniques

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Review of Projective Personality Assessment Techniques

Projective techniques of personality assessment have achieved widespread clinical and empirical use, along with a growing theoretical acceptance. The period from the 1930's through the early 1960's saw a tremendous upsurge in the development and application of these techniques, as the major professional role of the clinician focused on the skills of assessment. These "tests" have been subjected to criticism and scrutinized by the scientific community since the inception of the Rorschach technique of personality assessment in 1921. Yet, not only have they weathered the storms of criticism, but in this, the sixth decade of their use, we find them flourishing; in various stages of development and with varying degrees of established validity and reliability; their vigor and growth reflects the valuable tools they have proved themselves to be (Rabin & Haworth, 1960). In this present era, the role and function of the school psychologist has broadened considerably, to include an appropriate focus on indirect, consultative service and a proactive stance geared towards prevention as opposed to cure. However, assessment continues to be a major professional function and projective techniques have become increasingly valuable as primary tools with which to meet this need (Goh, Teslow, & Fuller, 1980).

Goh et. al. (1980) conducted a national survey concerning psychological test usage among school psychologists and found that approximately one half of a school psychologist's work time is still devoted to assessment. Although substantial emphases are being placed in the ares of intellectual, academic, and perceptual-motor assessment, personality evaluation was found to be ranked fourth in importance. Among the personality assessment devices administered, behavioral measures used accounted for only 8.6% of all assessment devices

administered each year. This would suggest that school psychologists are more "clinically" oriented and tend to use various types of projective tests in their approach to personality assessment. In particular, Goh et. al's (1980) survey found that school psychologists tend to prefer "quick, easy-to-use procedures (Bender-Gestalt, Sentence Completion, H-T-P) over more comprehensive, time consuming techniques such as the TAT and Rorschach" (p. 14). It was also noted that no objective measures (e.g., MMPI, CPQ, etc.) were ranked among the most frequently used personality measures.

Likewise, the trend toward the use of projective techniques in field settings has been underscored informally by professionals closely associated with the profession of school psychology. For example, recent correspondence with the acting president of the Illinois School Psychological Association has indicated that in the state of Illinois there has been a resurgence in the use of projective testing by school psychologists (A. Casey, personal communication, 1981). Thus, it appears that although most school psychologists do realize the importance of direct observation as a means of conducting assessment, actual behavior assessment may not be a frequent practice in the schools, and, presently projective testing seems to be the technique of choice.

As Howes (1981) suggests, projective tests raise psychological testing beyond the mere collection of information and routine computation of IQ's, and continue to provide insight into the dynamics of individual human personality. Projectives view personality in a global, holistic manner, rather than portraying personality segmentally as do objective personality inventories. In the minds of the present authors, projective tests could be viewed as the least non biased measures of personality functioning when not used isolatively.

Next to the Rorschach, one of the most widespread techniques used with children and adults is Murray's Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Murray introduced the term "projective test" to describe methods which attempt to "discover the covert (inhibited) and unconscious (partially repressed) tendencies of normal persons by stimulating the imaginative processes and facilitating their expression in words or in action" (Murray, 1938).

The popularity and utility of the TAT, led the way to the development of similar verbal and picture tests designed to meet the needs of various age groups such as The Childrens Apperception Test (CAT) (Bellak, 1949), and the Picture Story Test (Symonds, 1948) for use of adolescents.

In conjunction with the TAT, projective drawings appear to be the most frequent supplement to the Rorschach and have become a standard part of the test battery. Both the House-Tree Person (Buck, 1948) and Machover's Figure Drawing Technique (1949) grew from experience with the use of figure drawings as measures of intelligence. It became apparent that significant qualitative clues to the functioning of the total personality were evidenced in the symbolic speech of figure drawings; which seemed determined by the child's conscious and unconscious perception of himself/herself and significant people in his/her environment.

While there are a proliferation of methods which can serve to increase the understanding of a given individual, many are virtually untested and therefore of tenuous validity. However, it is recognized that no projective test can be better, more valid or reliable, than the psychologist's skill in the use of them in the clinical or school setting. The careful integration of several techniques, in conjunction with observations and historical data, can prove to be of great value towards the understanding of any given child.

Projective methods continue to flourish in clinical settings as does the controversy which surrounds their use. Some of the controversy is related to the appropriate use of projective techniques. Their use requires a sound theoretical background in the psychodynamic approach to personality development. For example, it is imperative for the school psychologist to understand the assumptions underlying these techniques, and to acknowledge the problems of reliability and validity.

Theoretical and Empirical Issues

One assumption then, is that when an individual is asked to impose meaning or order to an ambiguous or unstructured stimulus or situation, his/her responses will be a projection (or reflection) of inner needs, desires, conflicts, etc. That all behavior manifestations are expressive of an individual's personality is inherent in this hypothesis. This basic assumption appears well supported in the literature (Lindzey, 1952).

Derived from the projective hypothesis several corollary assumptions have been reported (Murstein, 1961). One of the most widely held assumptions suggests that ambiguity is directly related to the amount of projection. However, the relationship is more complex than it appears. In the case of Thematic Apperceptive Techniques there appears to be a curvilinear (rather than linear) relationship with stimuli of moderate ambiguity eliciting the greatest amount of projective data (Murstein, 1961).

Two other widely held assumptions are: 1) the strength of a need is a function of its manifestation directly or symbolically on the projective technique, and 2) there is a parallel between projective test behavior and the individual's behavior in the environment. It appears there is no simple relationship between projective test responses and behavior. The strength of a psychological need is only one of many variables which needs consideration.

Murstein (1961) has proposed a useful framework that considers the total situation in assessing need strength and making behavioral predictions. He contends that the individual's response is a function of the following variables: the projective stimulus properties, the perceived purpose of the testing, the individual's experiences, needs and expectations and the examiner's instruction and his/her interpersonal influences or bias.

For example, Musser and Naylor (1954) hypothesized that lower class children who show a high amount of fantasy aggression and a low fear of punishment relative to their aggressive needs would display more overt aggression than those with few fantasy (projected) aggressive needs and a high fear of punishment relative to those needs. Their hypothesis was strongly supported ($p =< .003$) and thus indicates the need to consider variables other than the need strength itself.

Lesser (1957) examined environmental factors which would enhance the prediction from fantasy aggression to overt behavior. He found a greater degree of correspondence between fantasy and overt aggression in children, where there was maternal encouragement of aggression than where there was maternal disapproval.

Kagan (1956) found a significant positive relationship between fantasy and overt aggression in children when: 1) the stimulus material was suggestive of aggressive content; and 2) when the overt and fantasy behavior were similar in their mode of expression (i.e. predicting fighting behavior from fighting themes as opposed to swearing themes). Kagan further suggests than anxiety over expression of aggression may inhibit its expression, even if the stimulus is strongly cued in that direction.

Leary (1957) suggests a multi-level framework with which to view personality. Level I considers how the individual is perceived by others, (observable behavior). Level II, is essentially how the individual views him or herself (the conscious self concept). Level III, the level of private symbolization,

considers unconscious processes and is said by Leary to be measured by projective techniques. Any projective technique however, will likely tap several levels of personality simultaneously.

Using Leary's approach, one may be working with a child who is not viewed as aggressive by classmates or the teacher (Level I), who does not perceive him or herself as aggressive (Level II), yet whose projective responses reveal a great deal of anger (Level III). A thorough understanding of the child would include consideration of all three levels. The child may be seething with anger, yet may repress and thus be unaware of these urges due to the anxiety or guilt which is aroused by their expression.

Murstein and Wolf (1970) report a significant correlation between amount of projection ane the degree of psychopathology as rated by trained clinicians. It appears that normal subjects are able to censor their responses on more structured, Level 1 tests, but are less able to censor their responses, and thus will project more "unconscious" material to highly ambiguous, Level III tests (such as the Rorschach). Psychiatric patients on the other hand expressed an equal degree of projection (and thus psychopathology) regardless of the degree of stimulus structure.

It is quite clear that such factors as the individual's willingness to reveal self, ego involvement in the task, variables which serve to inhibit need expression, the specific stimulus properties of the projective materials, the setting of the test situation and examiner effects, and the theoretical framework, are all factors which must be considered when interpreting a projective protocol.

Reliability, Validity and Meaningfulness

The reliability, validity, and meaningfulness of a projective test bettery are affected to a large extent by the examiner's experience with the tests, orientation to personality development and familiarity with the subject's background. Many studies have shown various techniques to have considerable

reliability and validity, particularly in the hands of a skilled clinician, while others have demonstrated them to be invalid. Part of the problem arises from the divergent definitions given to the concept of validity. Some authors look for a test's correlation with some criterion measure (Psychiatric diagnosis or performance on another "validated" instrument) others look for correlation coefficients between raw and "true" (error-free) scores; some stress accuracy in relation to the test user's purpose; for some validity means utility and others stress the interpretability of test scores (Ebel, 1961).

Projective techniques are intended to measure and describe psychological constructs and to allow psychologists to make appropriate inferences about an individual's personality and behavior. The APA Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests (APA, 1974) describes a psychological construct as "a dimension understood or inferred from its network of interrelationships" (p. 29). Construct validity is appropriate when the examiner has no single alternative criterion which is known to measure a specific trait. "Evidence of construct validity is not found in a single study; rather, judgments of construct validity are based upon an accumulation of research results" (p.30).

The process of validation of projective techniques seems more similar to validating an experimental hypothesis than to validating a more traditional psychological/educational test (Ainsworth, 1951). No single coefficient can be provided to satisfy a desire for the validity of a particular projective technique. Validity coefficients are situation specific and may provide support for a specific hypothesis about a particular technique and/or the underlying trait or process it is presumed to measure. It is reasonable to view the accumulated research as an interrelated network of data, which, when viewed collectively lends support to the construct of projective testing.

Singer (1968) provided an extensive review of the literature on the research applications of projective methods, citing a multitude of studies which provide considerable support for the validity of projective interpretations and the continued use of these techniques. When one considers the growing popularity and continued use of projective techniques (Howes, 1981) there is surprisingly little recent research on the validity and reliability of these methods in general. A computer search for the years 1975-1981 turned up only a handful of studies which primarily and specifically address these issues as applied to children and adolescents.

Miller and Hutt (1975) demonstrated a high retest reliability (.87 for males and .83 for females) as well as a high interjudge reliability (.89) for the psychopathology scale of the Hutt adaptation of the Bender-Gestalt Test over a two week interval.

Raskin and Pitcher (1977) provide support for projective interpretations of the Kinetic Family Drawing with kindergarten and first grade learning disabled children.

Schroth (1977) reports a high interscorer reliability for specific CAT scoring categories and suggests that interscorer reliability may increase as the age of the child increases.

Kelly and Berg (1978) report test-retest reliability and internal consistency coefficients in the 70's for a group of 488 fourth and eighth grade children using the Family Story Test.

Examining the temporal stability of specific Rorschach scoring features over a three year period, Exner, Armbruster and Viglione (1978) report coefficients of stability ranging from .66 to .90, with nine of the correlations in excess of .80.

Fallstrom and Vegelius (1978) demonstrated the utility/validity of the Rorschach in differentiating diabetic from non-diabetic girls (ages 7-15).

Kendra (1979) reports on the use of Rorschach protocols (scored blindly) in predicting which individuals would attempt suicide. Prediction levels were significantly above chance.

Hayden (1981) in a study using 67 emotionally disturbed children and adolescents provided support for the interpretive view that responses to cards IV and VII are representative of the child's relationship with his/her father and mother, respectively.

Howes (1981) provides a historical review of research on the Rorschach (primarily). He cites many recent studies which support the reliability of the Rorschach as well as its predictive utility.

Waugh (1981) provides support for continued research with the Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development by demonstrating high interrater and internal consistency reliabilities.

Criterion related validity is most commonly used in evaluating projective techniques where one evaluates the validity of the test by its ability to agree with some other measure (criterion). However, while projective tests often fare poorly in predicting psychiatric diagnosis, studies have shown that the failure is related to the criterion measure rather than to the adequacy of the projective instrument. Not only does Psychiatric diagnosis differ from setting to setting, but it varies considerably between clinicians within the same setting. While Schmidt and Fonda report nearly 80% agreement between pairs of psychiatrists on three major categories (organic, psychotic and characterological), "agreement with respect to diagnosis of the specific subtype of a disorder occurred in only about half of the cases and was almost absent in cases involving personality patterns, trait disorders and the psychoneuroses" (Schmidt and Fonda, 1956).

Predictive validity of projective testing is also questionable in part because of the erroneous assumption that projective methods should have special predictive capabilities. However, the value of using projectives is to understand the person "as he/she is" in contrast to how "he/she will be". The overall aim in projective testing is to gain an understanding of the total personality, assessment of the strengths, weaknesses and defenses and an understanding of the individual's primary needs, desires and degree of satisfaction or frustration in meeting those needs (Exner, 1976).

When evaluating the reliability of projective techniques, one must consider the nature of the variable being measured. Test-retest reliability, or consistency over time can only be considered relevant if the variable being measured is also consistent over time. Most of the traits and characteristics that are measured with projective devices are motivational and emotional in nature and there is no reason to assume that these characteristics are temporally stable. However, numerous studies demonstrate substantial reliability for both the Rorschach and the TAT, for specific variables, even when lengthy periods exist between testings (Exner, 1976).

Regarding internal consistency (split-half reliability) the questions of motivation, ego defense and control must be considered. An emotional, cathartic release on Card 1 of the TAT, may very likely be followed by a more controlled and benign story. Individuals must often pull back and regroup in the face of emotionally provocative stimuli. If the instrument is valid and reflects these changes then reliability is essentially an irrelevant matter. While critics may cite poor split-half reliabilities as a shortcoming of projective techniques, the fact is that none of these methods were designed with equivalence of the stimuli as a goal! Rather each specific part is expected to contribute to the whole, but not necessarily with the same weight or with the same impact for each subject (Exner, 1976).

To add to the meaningfulness of a test, Ebel (1961) suggests the use of a battery of tests, in which the intercorrelations among the test results adds to the meaningfulness of each test. Other factors which contribute to a test's meaningfulness are: operational definitions, reliability, norms, the importance or usefulness of the information the test provides, and the convenience in administration and use. Ebel is not suggesting to ignore traditional concepts of validity, but rather to move away from the phlisophical belief that quantifiable human traits and characteristics exist, independent of any operation used to measure them. The more information from a variety of sources that can be gathered and used integratively to make inferences and draw conclusions, the more meaningful and valid those descriptions are likely to be.

Projection in Children

While the purposes of testing and the techniques employed may be similar in the evaluation of both children and adults, there are special considerations when evaluating young children. The child's perception of the test situation and ease of interaction with the examiner will likely affect, in varying degrees, the nature and content of the responses as well as the overall productivity of the protocol. Therefore, while the child's age, developmental status and verbal ability are factors which will influence the quantity and quality (or richness) of responses, the child's desire or willingness to reveal their personality may be to a large extent dependent on his/her overall mood and ease with the examiner and the (test) situation (Rabin and Haworth, 1960).

Both the child and the projective responses obtained must be evaluated from both a developmental and normative perspective. Problems of distinguishing between what is immature and what is aberrant are correctly regarded as more acute in work with children than in work with adults (Altman, 1960). What would

be considered distorted responses and indications of pathology in adults, may be merely signs of developmental immaturity in children. Due to their limited experience with, and knowledge of, the social and physical reality around them and children's limited verbal and abstract reasoning skills, their "distorted responses" cannot necessarily be taken to mean defensiveness, regression or ego disintegration. The young child's Rorschach record, for example, may be more indicative of developmental status than of personality organization per se. For example, impulsive responses reflecting poor judgement and tenuous controls may be expected from a child of 4 or 5, who is just beginning to exercise control over his/her impulses. It is not until the age of 6 or 7 one begins to see patterns emerging, which reflect the child's general coping style (constriction, withdrawal, aggression, etc.)

In summary, the social setting of the test situation, the examiner's effects upon the child (and vice-versa), shortened attention span, limited verbal skills, as well as the child's spontaneous and often revealing conversation are all factors that deserve special consideration in the testing of children and interpretation of results.

Despite the criticism regarding lack of definitive evidence as to the reliability and validity of many of the projective techniques, many clinicians and school psychologists have not shown a reduction in their use. In fact, a number of surveys of clinicians and mental health agencies (eg. Wade, Baker, Morton, & Baker, 1978) and surveys of school psychologists (eg. Goh et. al., 1980) have not only shown that the use of projective techniques has not seriously diminished over time, but that most employment agencies and academic training programs continue to view such skills important prerequisites for future employment.

Realistically, many clinicians and school psychologists place much emphasis in their intuitive judgments when working in clinical and school settings. Thus these professionals tend to consider projective tests as more valuable than might be suggested by the equivocal reliability and validity studies.

Projective tests in general may be most valid when used as a type of structured clinical interview. It is in this context that projective tests are useful as a means of understanding the unique needs, interests, pressures, conflicts, affective and cognitive styles, and coping strategies that characterize each individual adult and/or child. Therefore, in light of the fact that there are few practical alternatives to tests, and that many clinicians and school psychologists prefer to rely on their clinical experience over empirical evidence when both are at odds, suggests that projective tests will continue to flourish over time and may become in the hands of an experienced user, our le t non biased assessment devices.

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